

Policy brief on a CBD Post-2020 biodiversity framework

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The current Strategic Plan of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which includes the 20 Aichi Targets, has a time frame until 2020. Therefore, the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-15), to be held in 2020 in Beijing, China, “is expected to update the Convention’s strategic plan” (www.cbd.int/post2020) which could be done by adopting a new strategic framework. The CBD has initiated processes to facilitate the development of such a Post-2020 strategy in a comprehensive and participatory manner.

The German Government is in favour of an ambitious Post-2020 CBD framework. To support its development politically and technically, the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) issued the project “Analysis of the Strategic Plan of the CBD” (short title) that analysed the content and the structure of the current Strategic Plan of the CBD, including its 20 Aichi Targets. The following considerations are an output of this analysis and of discussions during a national expert workshop held on the 12th and the 13th of April 2018 in Berlin.

Keep the level of ambition

It can be expected that a stocktaking of how far the Aichi Targets will presumably be reached by 2020 (e.g. through GBO 5 or the IPBES Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) will reveal that most Targets are not sufficiently implemented and that for some Targets there is very little progress. Nevertheless, there are strong arguments in favour of maintaining as much as possible of the current Strategic Plan of the CBD for the Post-2020 period and to keep the level of ambition. Failures with regard to the implementation of the Strategic Plan are in many cases not rooted in the Plan itself but in strong forces and power relations that exist independently of the CBD. Under the assumption that the 2050 vision to 'live in harmony with nature' remains valid, most of the 20 Targets also stay valid as they describe necessary steps to get closer to that vision and their full implementation would help to reach that long-term aim. Strongly reforming the Strategic Plan of the CBD would entail the risk of decreasing the level of ambition substantially for the Post-2020 period. Changing the overall structure in order to develop a completely new framework could heavily delay its implementation by cumbersome modifications of indicator frameworks and the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) for national uptake. Thus, there are good reasons to keep the overall structure of the current Plan for the Post-2020 CBD framework that should also consist of about 20 Targets.

It needs thorough consideration whether Targets explicitly related to the two Protocols under the CBD (Cartagena Protocol and Nagoya Protocol) should be directly included into the Post-2020 CBD framework or dealt with under the Protocols only. The fact that the memberships of the three agreements differ is a strong argument against the inclusion of specific Protocol-related Targets within the general Post-2020 CBD framework.

Focus on implementation

Given the above mentioned considerations it seems most crucial to push towards a better implementation of the current and the next strategic framework of the CBD and this effort should have priority over the question whether a Target meets the “SMART” criteria or not (“SMART”

standing for “specific, measureable, ambitious, realistic, time-bound”). To facilitate such implementation it could be useful to underpin each Target with milestones defining steps to be reached at certain points in time. This would also counter the impression that the level of ambition is generally and tremendously decreased by ‘postponing’ the timelines, e.g. by ten years or more. Further discussion would be needed to clarify whether these milestones equal sub-Targets, how specific they should be and whether they can (or should) incorporate additional topics into the Post-2020 framework. To avoid an ‘over-loading’ of Targets the formulation of ‘general guidance’ would be useful that could include all issues that are important for the implementation of several Targets, such as intergenerational justice, gender equality, the need to respect the rights of indigenous and other vulnerable communities and the references to obligations from other international agreements. Respective specifications that are found in some of the current Targets might in that case no longer be necessary, which would increase the consistency and simplicity of the framework. The suggested guidance could also explain certain terms used in the Targets, with reference to agreed definitions and approaches. It could further explain the interrelationship between different Targets and how steps to implement one Target would help to implement others. Furthermore, such guidance could highlight the interdependencies between a Post-2020 biodiversity framework and other global agreements e.g. relations to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) or the Paris Agreement. It could also point out synergies and indicate where joined efforts can help to reach multiple global environmental goals.

Set strategic timelines

No decision has yet been taken on the time span a Post-2020 biodiversity framework should cover and it is not automatically settled that the aiming point will be the year 2030. As said before, time frames of beyond 2020 may automatically be perceived as a lowering of the ambition level which would call for a Post-2020 period as short as possible (presumably 10 years). On the other hand, a longer timeframe (e.g. until 2035) would have the advantage to avoid too many re-negotiations of the framework on the path towards the 2050 vision of the CBD. Furthermore, a 10-year timeframe would imply that the new CBD Targets would ‘expire’ in the same year as the SDG framework. This would hold the disadvantage that no biodiversity Targets are in place when the Agenda for Sustainable Development needs updating after 2030. If the timeline would be set until 2035 underpinning the Targets with specific and time-bound milestones seems indeed very reasonable. If this was decided, it would probably make sense for practical reasons to negotiate only the Targets at COP 15 (in 2020) and to decide at the same time whether they should be supplemented by underpinning milestones or sub-targets; the latter could then be specified at COP 16 (in 2022).

Overall conclusion

The Strategic Plan of the CBD and the Aichi-Targets remain relevant, and this framework should be maintained to the highest degree possible beyond 2020. However, as a partial update seems unavoidable, the upcoming re-negotiations should be regarded as an opportunity for improving the framework with regard to its consistency, simplicity and – in particular – its coherency with other multilateral environmental agreements, while keeping the level of ambition. Additional guidance could help to show how the conservation as well as just and sustainable use of biodiversity can contribute to overcome other related social and environmental challenges. Specific and time-bound milestones or sub-targets could help fostering the urgently required implementation of the framework and could address relevant actors more specifically. These modifications could be important contributions to paving the way towards ‘living in harmony with nature’.